

# The Stories of the Two Sons and Evil Farmers

## Matthew 21:23-46

by David Servant

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*David Servant's sermon explores the contrast between true repentance and mere religious observance through the parables of the two sons and the evil farmers.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:28

**Topics:** "Repentance And Faith", "Rejection Of God"

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### Description

David Servant preaches on the contrast between Christ's reception by the common people and rejection by the religious leaders, highlighting the importance of genuine repentance and belief in God's message for salvation. Through the parable of the two sons, Jesus illustrates the difference between those who outwardly profess obedience but lack true repentance and those who were once rebellious but genuinely turned to God. The story of the evil farmers serves as a warning about the consequences of rejecting God's messengers and failing to produce the fruit of obedience that God desires from His people.

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### Transcript

Today's reading contrasts Christ's reception by the common people with His rejection by the religious leaders. When the leading priests demanded that Jesus tell them by what authority He had driven out the merchants from the Temple, He responded by asking them a question: Had God commissioned John the Baptist or did John act on his own initiative and power? Jesus knew the religious leaders would have trouble answering publicly, because He knew they really didn't believe John was commissioned by God, otherwise they would have repented at his preaching. However, Jesus also knew that the majority of the common people felt that John was a God-sent prophet, and the religious leaders would be taking a great risk to say otherwise publicly. They were trying to force Jesus to say something in public that they could use to discredit Him, but by His question, Jesus put them in that same place! Afraid of the people, they wouldn't give an honest answer, and their fear also prevented them from openly arresting Jesus later on, because so many people considered Him to be a God-sent prophet.

Then Jesus told the parable of the two sons to illustrate the difference between the religious leaders and the sinners who had repented. The first son, when told by his father to work in the vineyard, said, "No, I won't go." But he later changed his mind and obeyed. He represents those who were previously in rebellion toward God, but who repented.

The other son, when told by his father to go and work in the vineyard, said, "Yes, sir, I will." But he never followed through on what he promised. He represents the religious leaders who always talked about obedience to God's commands, but who never really obeyed. Jesus reprimanded them, saying that the worst sinners of their day, tax collectors and prostitutes would get into heaven before them because they repented when they heard John the Baptist preach.

Incidentally, notice that it wasn't their repentance that saved them; it was their belief in John's message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Because they believed John's message, they repented, proving that they really did believe. Salvation works the same way today. We are saved by God's grace through a faith that moves us to repent and begin a life of obedience. True faith always produces fruit.

The story of the evil farmers is easy for us to understand, but the religious leaders apparently missed its meaning at first. After hearing it, they unknowingly pronounced their own judgment when they condemned the wicked farmers who killed the vineyard owner's son. And once they understood that they were the wicked farmers in Jesus' story, they still refused to repent, fulfilling the scripture in the Psalms that talks about the builders rejecting a stone that would become the chief cornerstone. The chief cornerstone was the first and most important stone in any significant building in Jesus' time. Every other stone in a building had to be properly related to that most important stone, by being lined up with it. Those who aren't properly lined up with that stone are destined for trouble. As Jesus said, "Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls" (Matthew 21:44).

Q. If a person is unsaved, is he more likely to become saved if he's self-righteous or if he's a horrible sinner?

A. He is more likely to become saved if he realizes he needs to be saved. Self-righteous people often don't think they need a Savior, because they assume they have saved themselves by their good deeds. That's why horrible sinners are more likely to be saved, and that's why tax collectors and prostitutes were saved when John the Baptist preached while the religious leaders remained unsaved.

Q. In the parable of the evil farmers, the owner of the vineyard sent representatives and finally his own son to collect some of the fruit. What did the fruit represent? What does this tell us about what God desires from us?

A. The fruit represents acts of obedience, which is what God expects from His people.

Application: It's good for us to read sections of Scripture that contrast the reaction of believers and non-believers, because it helps us evaluate which category we are in. With whom did you identify in today's reading?

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